

**DATE:** September 5, 2002

**TO:** Local School Superintendents

**FROM:** Ted Stilwill, Director  
Department of Education

**SUBJECT: Operation Recognition, (Honorary High School Diplomas for Veterans)**

Two years ago the Iowa Legislature passed a bill, code named "**Operation Recognition**," authorizing the Department of Education to award high school diplomas to all honorable discharged World War II veterans who served their nation but were interrupted from completing their high school degree. The Department, in conjunction with the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs, developed an application for veterans or families to apply for the diploma. More than 800 diplomas were awarded. Recently, the Iowa Legislature amended the bill (Senate File 2152) to add eligibility to World War I, Korean Conflict and Vietnam Conflict veterans who also served but never received a high school diploma. We are sending you an application that can be used to apply for the honorary diploma. Please feel free to make as many copies as needed to serve the people in your communities. We are requesting your help to get the information out in your area.

Some LEAs chose to additionally award their own diplomas and organize ceremonies for veterans in their communities. We encourage you to do so again although we do not know how many individuals will be eligible. Most Korean and Vietnam veterans completed high school before they were drafted into service. We doubt there are many living WW I veterans although their families may apply. You may, however, have additional WW II veterans continue to be eligible.

A few districts contacted the Department asking if there were any procedures they should follow to honor and award their own high school diplomas. There are no set procedures. You may issue your own diploma, organize a veteran's recognition day, or help advertise the "**Operation Recognition**" program. The Department, if we receive the requests in time, plans to mail out diplomas to eligible veterans and families shortly before Veteran's Day. We will, however, continue to mail out diplomas throughout the year. School districts may want to organize a day of recognition around Veteran's Day to honor veterans in their community. Listed below are some ideas you may wish to consider:

1. Organize a recognition day for veterans who will be receiving their diplomas around Veteran's Day. Contact your local newspaper and media stations to cover this event.
2. Contact the American Legion to see if they could organize an honor guard to celebrate the veterans awarding of their diplomas.

3. Ask your social studies teachers to develop curriculum activities for their history classes.

- Assign students to conduct interviews with veterans and their spouses to gather oral histories dealing with the war and the home front sacrifices made for the war effort. Areas that might be covered could include some of the following topics:
  - How students were drafted right out of high school when they turned 18, not even allowed to finish school.
  - How veterans missed normal high school events, (i.e. prom, graduation, sports, etc.).
  - What it was like to travel to foreign lands, war zones, far away places.
  - What it was like on the home front, (i.e. rationing, air raids & drills, collection of cans and metal salvage, saving cooking grease, bond drives, etc.).
- Ask veterans to come into the classrooms and address their wartime experiences to your history classes.
- Collect and organize pictures from the time period for members of the community to remember this challenging time.
- Have students do a survey of the impact various conflicts had on your local community.

4. Award your own High School Diploma in addition to the State Honorary Diploma.

These suggestions are merely a catalyst of ideas to help you plan activities for your community. The "**Operation Recognition**" program awards you an opportunity that could benefit your school, students and community. Veterans or families who have heard public service announcements and want further information may contact you. We appreciate all the help you can provide in getting the information out. Please feel free to contact us at 515-281-3317 if you have any questions.